Children looked after and care leavers plan

2013-2015
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Produced in partnership with Policy Impact and Intelligence
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
November 2013
Foreword

I am pleased to contribute to Knowsley’s Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan. Children only have one childhood, so as Corporate Parent, we are committed to ensuring that every Child Looked After has the best possible start in life and they achieve outcomes that are at least equivalent to all Knowsley children. Children come into our care for a variety of reasons and at every age and we must approach our role as Corporate Parent with as much passion and commitment as any family would. This plan is for every single one of them, whatever their circumstances.

As Lead Member for Children and Families, I take a particular interest in the experiences of Children Looked After and am proud to be part of a Council and a wider partnership of agencies where responsibility for this group of children is embraced in a serious and committed fashion.

Our Children Looked After and their achievements are a source of great pride - all the more because many of them have overcome significant difficulties in their lives.

The views of Children Looked After have formed the basis of the promises in this document and the Knowsley Children Looked After Charter clearly sets out what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them. The Charter challenges us to make sure their experiences in care are positive, to keep them safe, and improve their on-going life chances.

This plan commits us to achieve our ambition and focuses our attention on what matters most - positive outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

Councillor Graham Wright
Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Social services need to be open and honest about the decisions that are being made about a young person. I feel that the council should continue listening to the MADE groups in Knowsley because we have the experiences. The listening needs to continue, and this plan helps us to see that it will. It also helps us to believe that we are taken seriously!

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

The Mission of the Children’s Care Council is to represent Children Looked After and care leavers and to work with the Council and its partners to improve ‘care experiences’ for children and young people who are looked after by Knowsley.

The members of the Care Council are delighted to be involved in supporting Knowsley in shaping services for Children Looked After, and intend to use our experiences and knowledge to effect positive change for other young people and children. We acknowledge that all children have different ‘journeys’ through the care system and this impacts upon them and others in different ways. This is why our work is important and our Children’s Charter focuses on the little things, the simple messages that we feel everyone who works with or makes decisions for Children Looked After should listen to and try to understand.

Being involved in shaping this plan has shown us that things can improve. Valuing, trusting and listening to the voice of children through the Care Council can help plans for change within children’s services be more effective.

We hope to continue to work closely with service leads and lead members to continue our work and support improvements which will in turn allow for more positive experiences for children in Knowsley. We are also proud to be contributing to meaningful changes to ‘Care’ nationwide.

Children’s Care Council
The Children’s Charter

Knowsley’s care experienced young people have worked together to simplify their collective messages to their corporate parents. The young people involved in writing and designing the Children’s Charter attend Knowsley’s Children In Care Council discussion groups MADE and MADE Junior, as well as design workshops to ensure their messages are clear and easily understood.

The aim of the Charter is to improve ‘care for Children Looked After as well as the support for care leavers.’ Each Charter statement relates to the experiences of young people, and reflects their views of the relationships they have with those who care for them and the communication, understanding and support they want from those agencies that come into contact with them.

"We have promoted our Children’s charter this year. It has taken a while for us to get it right but we are confident that it will now do what it’s intended to do - to raise awareness of what it’s like to be looked after by giving simple messages to remind staff working with children and young people what is important to us."

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

Get to Know Us

- Listen with your heart as well as your ears
- Make us aware of our rights
- Respect our privacy
- Think about our lives as a whole
- Treat me as an individual, we are all different
- Use your power to make things happen when they should
- Help us be safe
- Help us to be like kids who are not in care
- Take us seriously
- Involve us and be honest
- Think about how you share our information
- Put us in touch with the right people
- Give us a chance to tell you what’s on our mind
- If you tell me ‘no’ explain why
Most children thrive, prosper and have happy lives with their families. Knowsley will do everything possible to keep children living with their families, however this is not possible in all cases and the safety of the child is always paramount. For these children we recognise that even with additional support there are some families where the Local Authority needs to ‘intervene’ to ensure that their safety, health and well-being is protected. In some cases this results in the child becoming looked after.

Nationally, it is well documented that these children are more likely to have poor educational experiences, leave school with fewer qualifications, are at higher risk of offending, becoming a teenage parent, having mental health problems, smoking, substance misuse issues and leaving school without going into education, employment or training. As the local authority and ‘corporate parents’ for children in our care system we want to ensure that these inequalities do not continue and that our children leave care with the same positive outcomes as their peers.

This Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan sets out in more detail what Knowsley Council and its partners will do to ensure that the children in need who need to be Looked After achieve outcomes that are equivalent to all Knowsley children. Its purpose is to:

- Identify inequalities between Children Looked After and their peers and detail solutions.
- Establish current and future intentions in meeting the sufficiency duty.
- Identify our current provision of care and other support services and identify any gaps or improvements needed to improve outcomes for Children Looked After.
- Identify what we need to do to ensure that we maintain a sufficient range of placements and that ‘Children Looked After achieve outcomes that are equivalent to all Knowsley children’.

This plan details the outcomes and objectives for when the decision has been made for the child to be looked after. It will link with our ‘Early Help’ strategy which will set out how we propose to help children, young people and families earlier to avoid problems becoming bigger.

Financial imperative

Given the current financial climate it is essential to ensure that the services we procure to look after children deliver the highest standards of care. High quality services and placements are essential to reducing and eliminating the longer term inequalities often experienced by Children Looked After. The number, range and quality of Local Authority foster placements will continue to be developed to reduce the amount of money spent on expensive Independent Foster Agency placements (around £770 per week) and residential placements (around £2,150 per week).

Key terminology

When designing an approach for Children Looked After, it is essential that policy makers, commissioners and practitioners have a clear and common understanding of the key terminology used in this field.

Children in need - are defined in law as children who are aged under 18 and:

- Need local authority services to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development
- Need local authority services to prevent significant or further harm to health or development
- Are disabled

There are many levels of support that the local authority can provide Children in Need. These can include:

- Access to family support services
- After-school and holiday care or activities
- Advice, guidance and counseling
- Occupational, social, cultural or recreational activities
- Respite care

Looking after the child

A child can be looked after in many ways, for example:

- In foster care with a foster carer
- In foster care with a relative
- In residential care
- Placed with parents
- In independent living settings

Knowsley Council has a duty under the Children’s Act 1989 to ensure children are safeguarded from harm. The term ‘looked after’ is used when a child lives away from their family either as a voluntary arrangement or as a result of a court order. When the child is being looked after the Council is seen as the ‘Corporate Parent’.

When designing an approach for Children Looked After, it is essential that policy makers, commissioners and practitioners have a clear and common understanding of the key terminology used in this field.
National policy context

The outcomes of children in care have been a concern of successive governments. As a result there have been a number of highly influential reports and legislative changes that have informed policy development in this area.

The child protection system is in the process of being reformed following an independent review carried out by Professor Eileen Munro in 2010, which found that the child protection system has become over-bureaucratized, focused on compliance and has lost its focus on the needs and experience of individual children. Although the Government only issued revisions to Working Together in 2013, Knowsley has been a “journey” authority piloting elements of these reforms designed to deliver a truly child-centered system that protects some of our most vulnerable children and young people. The reforms are underpinned by three principles:

- Placing greater trust and responsibility in skilled front line professionals to do their jobs
- Reducing central Government prescription and unnecessary bureaucracy
- Building a system that is focused on the needs, views and experiences of vulnerable children

Munro’s reiteration of the key role of early help has been embedded in many of government’s policy and programmes. Early intervention remains a key tenet of our work with all children and young people and particularly vulnerable groups such as children who are looked after.

The Children’s Act (2004) places a duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of Children Looked After. Local authorities must give attention to any educational implications in relation to decisions about the welfare of those children.

The Children and Families Bill, which is expected to be enacted early in 2014, enhances current duties and includes legislation to improve provision for vulnerable children. The changes outlined in this bill will have a significant impact on the way we meet the needs of vulnerable children. The main elements of the bill include:

- Family Law
- Fostering and Adoption
- Shared Parenting
- Office of the Children’s Commissioner
- Special Education Needs

Research around the Care Planning Regulations (2010) identified some key themes:

- Instability and delay in achieving permanent homes for children
- High number of moves, often for systematic rather than child-focused reasons
- Children regularly return to the family home after being in care, with little forward planning
- The need to manage transition to adulthood better.
New regulations and guidance were put in place to address these issues and to improve the quality, consistency and continuity of planning for children’s placements and how these are monitored. The care plan was placed firmly as central to improving outcomes. It is viewed as the key means of bringing together the plans for the various elements of a child’s life for which the local authority is responsible, such as their health and educational progress.

Joint guidance from NICE and Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) focused on joint working to support Children Looked After to meet their full potential. In particular they offer a clear focus around:

- Promote stable placements and nurturing relationships
- Support a full range of placements
- Encourage educational achievement
- Support transition to independent living
- Meet particular needs of Children Looked After
- Place Children Looked After at the heart of decision making

Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012) held a key facet of simplifying existing arrangements around remanding children and young people up to the age of 17. All remanded children will be treated as looked after children by the local authority designated by the courts when they are remanded to custody. This intends to establish equitable treatment of children regardless of age or gender along with consistent services for all. The Act seeks to act as an incentive for Local Authorities to invest in alternatives to custody. Local authorities will also be responsible for fulfilling all Children Looked After duties in line with Care Regulations along with paying the full cost for youth detention accommodation.

An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay (2013), the government published its proposals for prospective adopters and strengthens the performance regime for local authorities. It places a clear focus on reducing the length of time that children and young people wait between entering care and adoption. This will be achieved through new adoption score cards, revision to approval processes for new adopters and creating new ways of recruiting new potential adopters.

Another part of central government’s ongoing service redesign is the introduction of fostering to adopt where the government will legislate to make fostering by potential adopters standard practice in many cases.

How this fits with the vision for Knowsley

The Knowsley Partnership has a vision to make ‘Knowsley: The Borough of Choice’. This is set out in the Strategy for Knowsley which is the overarching strategic partnership document for the Borough. All council and partnership strategies, plans and policies should ultimately support achievement of this vision. Ten strategic outcomes have been agreed to help the partnership to achieve its vision for Knowsley. Two of these relate directly to this plan and are highlighted below:

- We will put 10,000 Knowsley residents into long term jobs
- Bring our secondary education up to the national average or better for 5 GCSE A* - C, including Maths and English (minimum of 50%)
The Children and Families Strategic Plan adopted by the Children and Families board to improve the lives of children, young people and their families sets out three priorities, to:

• Improve the life chances of children and families disadvantaged by poverty
• Improve the life chances for children with additional needs and vulnerable children and families
• Help young people to have the skills and opportunities to achieve in learning life and work.

The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan will contribute to the achievement of the ‘Strategy for Knowsley’ intermediate outcome ‘Children Looked After achieve outcomes that are equivalent to all Knowsley children’.

The Children’s Charter

Sufficiency Needs Assessment

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

Partnership Strategic Needs Assessment

Early help for children, young people and families

Children with Disabilities

The Children and Families Strategic Plan

Strategy for Knowsley
The local context

Where we are now

This section provides a statistical context to the local edge of care and in care population from the 2013 “Securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children assessment”. The findings from the assessment, alongside the requests of local young people have gone on to inform the seven objectives arrived at in this plan. Under each objective, a more detailed reasoning for choosing this objective has been shown.

Children with additional needs who are at risk of becoming looked after

Some children are in need and risk becoming looked after because they are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, as a consequence of abuse or neglect due to a lack of parental care or control that is serious enough to affect progress and enjoyment of life. Safeguarding the wellbeing of these children and enabling them to remain within their families, where it is appropriate, is our primary concern.

Key Knowsley Statistics (2012/13)

Referrals to children's social care
- 2,895 referrals received in this year, which equates to 892.3 referrals per 10,000 children in Knowsley
- 44% of these referrals were due to ‘family dysfunction’
- 31.5% of referrals came from the Police (the highest referring agency)
- 28.6% of referrals came from health and education services

Re-referrals to children’s social care
- 942 (33.3% of the referrals) were re-referrals
- These were predominantly for younger children
- 46% of re-referrals were due to family dysfunction

Children in need (CIN)
- 1,217 children were identified as in need, which equates to 371 CIN per 10,000 children in Knowsley
- 23% are aged 0-9 years
- 64% are aged 10-19 years
- 52% are male and 48% are female

Edge of care
- 143 children with a child protection plan (CP), which equates to 44.1 children on a CP plan per 10,000 children in Knowsley
- 47% of these children are aged 0-4 years
- 57% are male and 43% are female
- 43% of all CP plans resulted from emotional abuse or neglect and 45% resulted from family dysfunction
- Two thirds of CP plans are in place for less than 12 months and 5% of CP plans are in place for longer than 18 months

There was an overall increase in the number and rate of referrals to Children’s Social Care in the last four years. Knowsley’s referral rate exceeds the national referral rate.

One in three referrals is a repeat referral in Knowsley. Nationally it is one in four.

The overall Children In Need caseload saw a slight increase during 2011/12 but decreased in 2012/13. The CIN rate in Knowsley is similar to our statistical neighbours but remains higher than the national average.

The proportion of children subject to a child protection plan (CPP) fell to its lowest level since 2009, though figures are above the national average.

Source: Securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children assessment 2013
Children Looked After (CLA)

In 2012/2013 Knowsley looked after 237 children, which equates to 72.3 Children Looked After per 10,000 Knowsley children. This is higher than the regional and national CLA rate, however the CLA rate in Knowsley has fallen in the last few years and is at present lower than statistical neighbours.

During 2009-2013, 40 Children Looked After were adopted, this equates to 18% of those leaving care. The average time taken for a child entering care to move in with an adoptive family was 540 days during 2008-2011, which increased to 748 days during 2009-2012. This is significant higher than the national average.

Key Statistics for Knowsley CLA (2012/13)

- Ethnicity composition of CLA in Knowsley mirrors the ethnicity composition of the wider population of Knowsley
- 25% are aged 0-5 years
  25% are aged 6-10 years
  33% are aged 11-16 Years
- 56% are Male and 44% are Female
- 70% of CLA come from the most deprived areas
- (from the CLA start date)
  10% been looked after for less than 6 months
  30% been looked after between 6 months-3 years
  20% been looked after between 3-5 years
  31% looked after between 5-10 years
  9% looked after for 10 years or more
  There is a trend between age of the child and length of beginning looked after - the younger the child the shorter care episode
- 66% of long term CLA are placed in foster care with varying lengths of placements
- 44% of those in care for over 10 years have been in their current placement longer than 5 years
- Percentage of CLA with three or more placements during 2012 is lower than the national percentage and similar to the statistical neighbours percentage
- Percentage of CLA who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years - and of those who have been in the same placement for at least 2 years or placed for adoption - is slightly lower than the national and statistical neighbours percentage
- 86% were subject to a legal order
- 14% were at the request of the family
- 56% of CLA entered care as a consequence of abuse/neglect or family dysfunction
- 74% of CLA were looked after in foster placements
- 12% of CLA were placed with parents or other parental responsibility

4% of CLA are placed outside the 20 mile radius (better than the national average of 12%)
50% CLA adopted during the period were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision. Length of time the process takes is a concern for Knowsley
In 2008/2009: 4.9% of CLA have a disability
In 2012/2013: 10.1% of CLA have a disability
Higher percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation compared to national
Higher percentage of children leaving care over the age of 16 who remained looked after until their 18th birthday
Knowsley has a similar emotional and behavioural health of Children Looked After score compared to national
Higher percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training compared to national
Percentage of CLA achieving Key Stage 2 level 4 including English and Maths is same as the national percentage but lower than statistical neighbours
Percentage of CLA achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs is higher than the national and statistical neighbours percentages
Percentage of overall absence from school for children who have been looked after for longer than 12 months is lower than the national and statistical neighbours percentage
Percentage of CLA identified as having a substance misuse problem in 2012 is lower than the national and statistical neighbours percentage
Percentage of CLA subject to a conviction, final warning or reprimand during 2012 is lower than the national and statistical neighbours percentage

It is widely established that the best place for any child to grow up is within their family. Accommodating children and young people is therefore often a last resort. However, where it is not possible for children or young people to return home to their family we will provide stable, alternative, long term care arrangements wherever possible.
Where we want to be

From engagement with young people and an analysis of current context the outcomes we want to achieve are:

**Strategy for Knowsley**

Intermediate outcome

**Children Looked After**

achieve outcomes that are equivalent to all Knowsley children

Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan outcomes

- More Children Looked After achieve their potential through improved engagement and educational attainment
- Engaged children and young people through the decision process
- Care leavers have the ability to maintain their own home
- A stable and positive placement and good quality of care for each child looked after
- Improvement in the care experience for all Children Looked After and care leavers

- More young people aged 16+ who are looked after are in education, employment or training
- More Children Looked After participate in suitable out of school activities
- Children Looked After have improved emotional, behavioural and physical health
- More children safe from harm
To achieve the outcomes set out on page 19, Knowsley has identified seven objectives which will help improve the life chances of Children Looked After. The objectives have been based on the sufficiency needs assessment 2013.

1. Encourage participation in suitable out of school activities
2. Support children looked after to do well at school and support young people leaving care to continue with their education or gain employment or training
3. Provide a stable and long-lasting placement with good quality of care for each child
4. Help young people understand how their life choices will affect their safety, health and wellbeing
5. Support care leavers to secure and maintain permanent and affordable accommodation and take responsibility for their behaviour
6. Involve children or young people in the decisions made about their life and act on feedback to improve their experiences and the quality of services
7. Support our children looked after to receive the right support to meet their health and wellbeing needs
1. Encourage participation in suitable out of school activities

Why is this important?
Participation in recreational and leisure activities helps build skills and confidence that contribute to resilience in young people. All of this has a positive impact on young people’s health and wellbeing and can act to reduce risk taking behaviours. For Children Looked After it provides opportunities to form friendships and contribute meaning and purpose in life.

In Knowsley
• All CLA have the opportunity to apply for a free leisure pass
• Participation is reviewed and assessed through care plans and statutory visits

"It’s good to meet up with other young people in care, it makes you feel like you don’t have to hide anything about who is picking you up, like your foster carer."

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

How will we do this?
• Promote local community activities and leisure passes for Children Looked After and care leavers
• Ensure that all CLA have an activity plan
• Engage young people in developing local services
• Provide opportunities for young people to meet those with similar experiences to them

2. Support children looked after to do well at school and support young people leaving care to continue with their education or gain employment or training

Why is this important?
Nationally the education attainment of Children Looked After is well below that of their peers. This inequality further impacts on their education, employment or training when they leave school. In 2012 29% of 19 year old care leavers were not in education, employment or training. It is important that this is addressed, because a poor start in life or transition into adulthood can have an impact on poverty, health, wellbeing and life chances throughout life.

In Knowsley
• At the end of reception Children Looked After achieve better early years outcomes than their Knowsley or national peers
• Children Looked After achieve similar outcomes at the end of primary school. 50% of Knowsley Children Looked After in 2012 achieved Key Stage 2 level 4 in English and Maths, which is the same as the national percentage
• 12.5% of Children Looked After gain 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths, which is lower than the 14.6% for England Children Looked After. 40.9% of Knowsley children gain 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths (59.4% England)
• 4% overall absence (authorised and unauthorised) from school of children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months, which is lower than the 7.4% for England
• 29% of young people aged 19 who were looked after aged 16 were not in education, employment or training, which is lower than England’s percentage of 32%. For every year on record, more children who leave care in Knowsley have been in education, employment or training by age 19 than the national average
• The numbers of young people who have left care and gone on to university or higher education has gone up from 3 in 2010 to 11 in 2012

"Kids in care need support at school by school so we think they need more training to understand what it’s like to be in care. This might help kids have friends who understand and it might help stop bullying."

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

"The bosses in leisure are our corporate parents as well so they should let us use their service like a parent would let you use the things that they own......we are made up that young people are getting leisure passes now, we helped get this agreed."

Young member of the Children’s Care Council
How will we do this?

- Ensure that all CLA have access to the 2 year offer and make good progress and ensure that practitioners in Early Years settings accurately observe and follow CLA’s interests in order to accelerate their learning and development.
- Ensure that every CLA has a Personal Education Plan, which is of good quality and consistency.
- Ensure partnership working to identify key targets for individual children and monitor these to support them achieving their potential.
- Evaluate the use of Pupil Premium by schools to ensure that this is appropriately targeted to the needs of Knowsley Children Looked After and schools can demonstrate evidence of its impact.
- Improve monitoring of the progress made by Knowsley Children Looked After and schools can demonstrate evidence of its impact.
- Review the Virtual School Leadership arrangements to improve educational outcomes for its pupils.
- Improve joint planning between education services and children’s social care to minimise the number of times Children Looked After need to move to a different school during their education.
- Improve the communication between Knowsley’s Virtual School and employment services to ensure that Children Looked After’s needs are identified and supported.
- Ensure that young offenders and children on remand engage in education, employment or training.
- Knowsley will review the availability and accessibility of education support and employability services for Children Looked After, including the transition from education support to the employability service.
- Ensure all young people have Pathway Plans and action is taken to ensure appropriate EET plans are implemented.

3. Provide a stable, long-lasting and appropriate placement which will offer continuity and where the child feels safe, has the ability to establish and sustain positive and trusted relationships with carers/adults and maintain networks with friends and family.

Why is this important?

Stability, continuity and attachment are all key to building levels of resilience for a successful adult experience as well as their current happiness. Young people who experience appropriate stable placements are known to succeed educationally, be in work, settle-in and manage their accommodation after leaving care. Children and young people are more likely to have positive relationships with carers and adults, form a network of friendships and have better improved emotional wellbeing if their placement is stable. Where a move is felt to be in their best interests a positive move is more likely when children are involved in these decisions.

In Knowsley:

- Very small percentage (4% in 2012) of children are placed outside of a 20 mile radius when compared to the national average (12%).
- Fewer children are now classified as ‘in care at home’ (12%) as thresholds have been applied more thoroughly and the current CLA population which is now smaller than in previous years is consider a truer reflection of need within the borough.
- Our rate of CLA per 10,000 has reduced significantly (73 CLA rate). It remains higher than the national CLA rate (60 CLA rate) but is lower than statistical neighbours (95.8 CLA rate).
- Placement stability is an essential building block for delivering positive care outcomes and only 10.6% of children and young people had three or more placement moves during 2012, better than the national averages of 11%. There are a significant number of Knowsley children who remain in care for long periods of time.
- Those in care for upwards of 7 years are likely to have changed foster homes within the last 5 years.

“Kids that live away from Knowsley need to see their Social worker more and need to be checked on to see if they are okay because they are in a worse position to tell someone if they are far away from them.”

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

“The stay put policy needs to be understood and clear so there are less placement breakdowns at a time when care leavers need more support than ever with education and employment and the decisions they need to make about the rest of their lives.”

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

“Tutoring for young people who have ‘fallen behind’ is good but schools need to be more understanding about the way young people act sometimes or why they can’t do their homework because so much is going on with their family.”

Young member of the Children’s Care Council
We have been involved in training Social workers and support staff this year and we will continue to improve our training packs to make sure they are informative and educational. We are also going to be involved in training young people in schools in the near future as well as MASW students at John Moores University.

""We have been involved in training Social workers and support staff this year and we will continue to improve our training packs to make sure they are informative and educational. We are also going to be involved in training young people in schools in the near future as well as MASW students at John Moores University.

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

Consistency is so important within support from social services to help children in care have better relationships so they don’t feel let down or left out when there are changes in social workers or placements… we get used to someone then they leave or their team changes.

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

It’s really hard to keep things normal with your brother or sister when you are spilt up from them. Having to have ‘contact’ feels weird and it does affect the relationship you have with them later on.

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

• Only 11.4% children/young people had three or more placement moves during the year, which is in line with the national average of 11%
• 10% of CLA are placed in residential care, which is much lower than the national average
• Three in four Knowsley CLA are in LA foster placements which is in line with the national average
• In the three years to 2012, Knowsley placed 40 looked after children into adoption, 18% of all those leaving care. This compares favourably with a national average of 12%. The average time taken for a child entering care to move in with their adoptive family (for children who have been adopted) has increased from an average of 540 days (2008-2011) to 748 days (2009-2012) - an increase of 208 days. This is against an increase nationally of 11 days to 636 days

How will we do this?

• Systematically review the experience of Children Looked After in placements to understand what can be improved
• Undertake Regulation 33 visits, increase our engagement with other LAs and improve our oversight of CLA placed out of borough or placed a significant distance away
• Promote the ‘Stay Put’ policy to make it possible for young people to remain with their foster family beyond the age of 18
• Foster carers will share information about themselves and their background to help the child settle and use the Placement Plans to help each foster carer to understand the child
• Ensure that we minimise the number of placement moves
• Promote and develop permanent alternatives through Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders and Residence Orders
• Undertake and strengthen the processes for the recruitment, induction, monitoring and supervision for all foster carers
• Evaluate the Foster Carers payment scheme and implement recommendations
• Improve support to carers to promote the stability of CLA through the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Panel
• Redesign Knowsley MBC Residential provision and outreach services
• Work with Placements North West and providers to increase the range, choice and quality of placements to meet diverse needs
• Strengthen mechanisms for seeking feedback on placements
• Increase the number of potential adopters working collaboratively with regional partners

4. Help young people understand how their life choices will affect their safety, health and wellbeing

Why is this important?

Gaining independence and making life choices can be difficult and have a lasting impact on the future for any young person. Without the support of good parents these choices can be more difficult. We want to encourage Children Looked After to become more involved and to take more control over their health and wellbeing. We believe that providing more opportunities for people to say what’s wrong, what’s right and deciding what needs to be done builds resilience and also improves services. The Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy commits to empowering people to improve their own lives.

In Knowsley

• During 2012/2013 13 CLA had unauthorised absences of 24 hours
• There was no Knowsley Children Looked After subject to a conviction, final warning or reprimand during 2012 (Nationally 6.9%)

What will we do?

• Focus on relationship building with advisors, family peers etc
• Support CLA participation in positive and meaningful activities
• Ensure CLA have access to appropriate emotional and mentoring support, identify ‘emergent’ anti-social behaviour issues involving Children Looked After, to ensure appropriate planning and decision making and restorative support processes
• Implement the Merseyside child sexual exploitation protocol to improve our response to children missing from care deemed at risk
• Ensure all young people returning to care have a return to care interview
• Improve the protocols associated with Children Looked After who commit offences and are at risk of entering the criminal justice system
• Ensure effective Assessment, Planning, Intervention and Support for young people in the youth justice system

""We have been involved in training Social workers and support staff this year and we will continue to improve our training packs to make sure they are informative and educational. We are also going to be involved in training young people in schools in the near future as well as MASW students at John Moores University."

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

""It’s really hard to keep things normal with your brother or sister when you are spilt up from them. Having to have ‘contact’ feels weird and it does affect the relationship you have with them later on."

Young member of the Children’s Care Council
5. Support care leavers to secure and maintain permanent and affordable accommodation and take responsibility for their behaviour

Care leavers need clear guidance about entitlements and support that they will get. We have the Care Leavers Charter now so we can make sure we monitor how things are going by asking care leavers if they are clear on their entitlement.

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

Why is this important?
Transition to adulthood is often a turbulent time for any young person. Housing is a critical element of the transition out of care and many care leavers have to cope with setting up home at a much younger age than other young people and are known to be at greater risk of becoming homeless.

In Knowsley
• In 2012 100% of Knowsley’s 16+ leavers were found suitable accommodation (Nationally 88.3%)

How will we maintain this?
• Provide Independence training sessions on an ongoing basis and ensure it is based on individual needs and requirements
• Continue to ensure tenancy support is based on individual needs and requirements

6. Involve children or young people in the decisions made about their life and act on feedback to improve their experiences and the quality of services

Social services need to be open and honest about the decisions that are being made about young people. I feel that the council should continue listening to the MADE groups in Knowsley because we have the experiences.

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

Why is this important?
Ensuring that children’s views are listened to and that they are able to influence care decisions will make it more likely that children’s placements meet their emotional needs and is also likely to reduce placement disruption. Encouraging engagement and participation with children and young people helps encourage a great sense of self worth, confidence and promotes self esteem and individual’s wellbeing.

In Knowsley
• CLA and Care leavers in Knowsley have a wide range of opportunities to become involved in the planning, design and delivery of services through nationwide consultation, local discussion groups, CICC and youth groups
• We have extended the use of social networking sites to gain views wishes and feelings about services provided
• We have improved the engagement of younger looked after children through MADE Junior
• The Knowsley Participation standards assessment is used within our social care teams to focus on keeping the child at the heart of their assessment, planning and evaluations for children
• In 2011 Knowsley met 5 of the 7 Lilac standards
• CLA are involved in the recruitment and selection of all social care staff and carers
• Young people deliver training across social care on service user voice
• There has been an increase in referrals for Independent Advocacy for case conferences

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Young member of the Children’s Care Council

“Personal advisors are needed for support related to care leavers like housing benefits, income support when you are at college etc. They are needed to make sure you are getting all help that’s needed and they should be someone there to stick up for your rights and choices.”

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

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Young member of the Children’s Care Council
Over the past year we have redesigned our groups to make sure we can reach out to more children and young people looked after and care leavers. Now we have MADE, MADE junior, MADE 4 Us as well as our facebook page and twitter account.

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

We are happy that service managers are working closer with us to drive forward service developments. It makes us feel listened to and gives us motivation to do more.

Young member of the Children’s Care Council

How will we do this?

- Ensure regular and meaningful engagement and consultation with children and young people in our care so that they can influence services provided for them
- Ensure all children and young people actively participate in their reviews, have access to independent advocacy and ensure that children and young people feel that their involvement in their reviews has made a difference
- Review our CLA Charter to ensure it reflects what our young people want
- Re-commission a review of the Lilac standards to ensure we have made progress in listening to Children Looked After
- Consult with advisors and young people locally, regionally and nationally to influence policy and promote meaningful change
- Support the involvement of children and young people through our MADE and MADE Junior and in Corporate Parenting
- Ensure that the physical and emotional health needs of Knowsley children and young people are assessed and planned for, and they have appropriate access to all the health services they require
- Train, support and advise staff and foster carers on promoting healthy lifestyles
- Strengthen the relationship between CAHMS and Children’s Social Care so that young people looked after receive timely and quality support
- Increase the number of CLA who have all their immunisations and are registered with a GP
- Reduce the number of young people who require dental treatment

Why is this important?

Children Looked After and young people share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but often to a greater degree, and in the context of greater challenges such as discord within their own families, frequent changes of home or school, and a lack of access to the support and advice of trusted adults. Children often enter the care system with a worse level of health than their peers, in part due to the impact of poverty, poor parenting, chaotic lifestyles and abuse or neglect. They need local authorities as ‘corporate parents’ to ensure that the care system helps to redress some of these disadvantages, and supports them to achieve health and other outcomes similar to those of children and young people who have not had to be taken into care. The fact that longer-term outcomes for Children Looked After remain far worse than their peers is evidence of an important health inequality, and needs to be treated as a public health priority.

Long term improvements to health and wellbeing depend on changes to personal behaviour - it is not something Council and partner services can do alone. We want to move away from a health and care system which primarily meets people’s needs to one which emphasises greater prevention and health promotion and empowers people to improve their own and their family’s health and wellbeing.

In Knowsley

- 96% of CLA for over 12 months have completed a dental and health assessment
- 97.4% of CLA for over 12 months have a completed dental assessment
- 95% of CLA for over 12 months have a completed health assessment
- There are fewer numbers of CLA identified as having a substance misuse problem than their peers nationally
- There has been an increase in CLA with disabilities or complex needs
- Knowsley Children Looked After have a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire score of 13.80, the same nationally. This questionnaire is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire for 3-16 year olds

How will we do this?

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We think that health services could be personalized as well as being flexible to meet individual’s needs. We are asked by health watch to get involved in shaping future services, which we are really pleased about. Having the right support at the right time makes a massive difference.

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Young member of the Children’s Care Council
Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

This section explains the approach to implementing and managing the plan to ensure we meet our objectives. It also sets out our approach to ensuring that the identified actions remain fit for purpose and have the greatest impact on achieving the Children and Families Strategic Plan priority of ‘improving life chances for Children Looked After’ and the outcomes detailed in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy related to vulnerable children and adults. This plan is accompanied by an action plan which details actions under each of the seven objectives and details the practical steps that we will take to achieve them. The action plan is a live document that will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that our approach is responsive to emerging needs, challenges and opportunities.

The success of this plan will depend on the leadership and support of all partners. The plan will be delivered via a wide network of organisations and partnerships. Partner’s commitments are set out in action plans, alongside measures and targets to assess impact and effectiveness of our approach.
Indicators

Alongside service based output measures a suite of high level population indicators have also been compiled to monitor the impact of this plan’s actions. The Children and Families Board will be held accountable for these indicators by the scrutiny board, which consists of elected members.

### Outcomes

| More Children Looked After achieve their potential through educational attainment and positive social experience at school |
| Engaged children and young people through the decision process |
| Care leavers have the ability to maintain their own home |
| More young people who are looked after and post-16 are in education, employment or training |
| Children Looked After have improved emotional, behavioural and physical health |
| More Children Looked After participate in suitable out of school activities |
| A stable and positive placement and good quality of care for each child looked after |

### Related indicators

| The attainment gap between CLA in Knowsley and CLA nationally for: |
| Indicators to be developed through a survey of CLA (Placeholder) |
| Care leavers in suitable accommodation |
| Care leavers in education, employment or training |
| Emotional and behavioural health of Children Looked After |
| Indicators to be developed through a survey of CLA (Placeholder) |
| Stability of placements of Children Looked After: number of placements |
| Children Looked After placed more than 20 miles from home |
| Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days) |
Corporate Parenting
A Local Authority has a legal responsibility when a child or young person is looked after to share the duties and responsibilities of the child’s parent(s). This is referred to as being a Corporate Parent. As the Corporate Parent we aim to ensure that ‘Children Looked After achieve outcomes that are equivalent to all Knowsley children’.

Children Looked After
This term applies to children currently being looked after and/or accommodated by local authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts, including those children where the agency has authority to place the child for adoption. It does not include those children who have been permanently adopted.

Glossary

Child Protection Plan
A Child Protection Plan is a working tool that should enable the family and professionals to understand what is expected of them and what they can expect of others. The plans may set out:
- The cause of harm to the child
- The practical long and short term goals
- What the family and workers involved need to do to meet the goals
- Who will be checking the child is safe and well on a day to day basis
- The contingency plan - what should be done if the child protection plan is not working

Full Care Order
When a court has made an order in relation to the child, known as a care order, this means that the local authority will take on responsibility for the child together with the parents. The local authority will make arrangements for where the child should live, in discussion with the parents. A Full Care Order is usually made at a final hearing. An Interim Care Order is made and renewed throughout the course of the proceedings and can sometimes be a “holding position” while the local authority carry out assessments.

Sufficiency Duty
A Local Authority also has a statutory duty to consider the needs of the local population of vulnerable children and assess whether current services are sufficient to meet them. Legislation requires local authorities to take reasonable practicable steps that secure sufficient accommodation for Children Looked After under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in a child's best interest to be accommodated within the local authority area. This is called ‘The sufficiency duty’ and is about having the right placement, in the right place, at the right time to help improve outcomes for Children Looked After. To meet its sufficiency duty, the Council has produced a Sufficiency Needs Assessment which describes the Children Looked After population and the scale of need across a number of vulnerable groups, whilst outlining service outcomes to date. It also identifies those gaps the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan most needs to address and these are included in ‘Where are we now’.